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Imported violence? Juvenile delinquency among Balkan youths in Switzerland and in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Abstract: The article presents a study about juvenile delinquency in Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study found that delinquency rates are significantly higher among youth in Switzerland than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, except for group fights, robbery and assault. It revealed that violent victimization rates are relatively higher in Bosnia and Herzegovina than in Switzerland. The authors believe that these findings show the importance of focusing more on the conditions of successful integration in the host country and less on cultural and ethnic aspects. Tables that depict the results of the study are also presented.

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Imported Violence?

Juvenile Delinquency Among Balkan Youths in Switzerland and in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Background

Self-reported delinquency is generally considered to provide more valid measures of criminality when the purpose is to compare different groups or countries (Killias 2002). It is, however, only since the first international self-reported delinquency study of 1992 that such data are being used for international comparisons on a broader scale (Junger-Tas et al. 2010). In the present case, we shall use this method to compare (1) delinquency and violence in Switzerland and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and (2) among juveniles of Swiss background and among immigrant juveniles including those originating from former Yugoslavia who live in Switzerland.

In doing this, we shall not ignore research conducted in the Netherlands (Junger 1990) suggesting that immigrant youths may, in response to self-report items, underreport offending more than native juveniles. To the extent that self-reported delinquency rates are higher among immigrant respondents, we can conclude with reasonable confidence that the differences are more than the simple reproduction of differential treatment by victims and the police. Over the last few years, a number of studies have indeed identified higher rates of self-reported delinquency (and especially of violent offences) among young immigrants in the Netherlands (Junger-Tas 1997), in the Canton of Zurich (Eisner, Manzoni & Ribeaud

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2000), in Germany (Baier et al. 2006) and, recently, in the second international self-report study (Junger-Tas et al. 2010). In Switzerland and according to this same study, violent offences are particularly more frequent among juveniles from Balkan countries, Turkey and the Near East.

If one accepts this finding, the question arises whether the difference is produced by an imported “culture” conflict (Sellin 1938), or whether juveniles of immigrant background—and particularly those from certain parts of the World—face greater problems of integration than those originating from other countries. Within the frame of the second international self-reported delinquency study, it has been possible to study delinquency not only among juveniles from various backgrounds in Western European countries, but to compare delinquency and violence in some countries of immigration and of emigration. In the present case, the chance for such a comparison came thanks to a grant by the Swiss Foreign Ministry (Department of international cooperation).

A Note on the Methodology

Thanks to the support given by the Swiss National Science Foundation, a random sample of 3,468 juveniles, from 72 schools across the entire country, were interviewed in spring 2006. With the approval and support of the Conference of the Cantonal Ministries of Education, the sampling procedure developed by the Swiss Statistical Office in connection with the well-known PISA studies was used. The sample included students from grades 7 to 9. Out of the 72 selected schools, two had to be substituted and two refused to participate. Parents were informed about the study prior to the survey. None of the parents and only one student refused to participate. On the day of the survey, 6.3% of the students were absent from school.

The survey in Bosnia-Herzegovina is based on a national random sample of 37 schools with 1,756 students enrolled in grades 7 and 8. Thanks to the active involvement of the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo, the survey was conducted on a national level and no selected school refused participation. Only one student refused to participate. On the day of the survey, 6% of the students were absent from school.

The procedure and the questionnaire were—at least, as far as of interest here—identical in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Switzerland. There were some differences in sampling, since Bosnia-Herzegovina has not yet participated in the PISA tests. Additionally, Swiss students responded to an on-line questionnaire in the schools’ computer room, whereas students in Bosnia-Herzegovina had to fill out a paper-pencil questionnaire (Budimlić, Maljević, & Muratbegović 2010). Former experimental tests of the two methods of administration have shown (Lucia et al. 2007), however, that results obtained through paper-pencil questionnaires and on-line do not differ much (or consistently). Therefore, a valid comparison seems possible between the results obtained in the two countries. Given that there is no compulsory 9th grade in Bosnia-Herzegovina, all comparisons with students in this country will be limited to grades 7 and 8.

Research Questions

The questions of interest here are whether

- (1) juveniles of the so-called first and second generation, and particularly those from the Balkan region living in Switzerland, report higher rates of offences than those from other countries and those of Swiss origin;

- (2) juveniles living in Bosnia-Herzegovina have higher or lower rates of delinquency and violence than juveniles living in Switzerland—including those who immigrated from the Balkan region.

If juveniles living in Bosnia-Herzegovina were to report higher rates of violence than those living in Switzerland, the conclusion might be that juveniles living in Bosnia-Herzegovina had suffered more from traumas related to war experiences than Swiss and Bosnian juveniles living in Switzerland, or that violence is culturally more accepted in Balkan countries. However, if juveniles in Bosnia-Herzegovina do not show higher rates of violence than Swiss juveniles, the conclusion might be that the experience of migration and difficulties of integration in the host country produce problems of maladjustment. An alternative, although not a very serious explanation, would be that there is a self-selection process at work, in the sense that juveniles who migrate are particularly delinquent from the start.

Results

As a first step, weighted rates of self-reported delinquency will be compared for juveniles of Swiss, Balkan and „other migrant“ origins living in Switzerland. Grades 7 to 9 will be considered. “Swiss” juveniles are considered all those born in Switzerland and whose parents were also born in Switzerland, in addition juveniles born abroad but whose parents were both born in Switzerland are also considered to be of Swiss origin. Juveniles considered to be “migrant from the Balkan region” are all those comprised in the Swiss sample whose parents were both born in that area¹—independently of where the respondent was actually born. Juveniles considered to be of “other migrant” origin are all those whose parents were both born in any country located outside the Balkan region.

As Table 1 illustrates, juveniles from the Balkan region living in Switzerland admit substantially more often than juveniles of Swiss origin to having committed assault, robbery, mugging and theft of vehicles. Despite the relatively small sample of juveniles from the Balkan region ($N=318$, or – non-weighted—357), differences are significant if assault, robbery and mugging are all brought into one category (6.0% vs. 1.8%, $p<.01$). Juveniles from the Balkan region also report rates more than twice as high with regard to fights. In the case of shoplifting and selling of (soft) drugs, Swiss juveniles have (though not significantly) higher rates—a result that does not come as a surprise given the small scale of shops in Bosnia-Herzegovina (and the less prominent role of large supermarkets) and the permissive attitudes towards legal and illegal drugs among the Swiss public. In these domains juveniles from “other” countries rank highest, whereas they have a middle position in the domain of violence.

Regarding victimisation including bullying, differences between juveniles from Swiss and Balkan backgrounds are relatively modest, whereas juveniles from other migrant backgrounds have far higher rates (Table 2). This could mean that violence and delinquency are not uniquely directed at juveniles from similar ethnic and geographic backgrounds, but that Swiss and “other” migrants are relatively often victimised. This may be related to the fact that other nationalities are relatively rare and cannot resist mobbing and other attacks as a group. The results for bullying are particularly noteworthy in this respect.

¹ In the present context, juveniles are considered as originating from the Balkan region if their parents were born in one of the following countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Kosovo and Turkey. Among the 357 respondents falling into this category, only 60 have a parent born in Turkey (including Kurdistan)—Turks are, as these figures illustrate, a far smaller minority in Switzerland than in Germany.

Table 1 Self-reported delinquency among juveniles living in Switzerland who are of Swiss, Balkan and any other migrant origin (students enrolled in grades 7 to 9)

Offences	Juveniles of Swiss origin (N=2067)	Juveniles originating from the Balkan region (N=357)	Juveniles originating from other countries (N=415)
Assault / threats	0.7	3.2 ^a	1.5
Mugging	0.8	2.3	1.0
Robbery	0.6	1.8	1.0
Theft of bicycles / motorcycles	3.1	5.8 ^a	3.9
Shoplifting	8.3	6.1	9.2 ^g
Drug trafficking	2.4	1.6	3.3
Group fights	6.1	16.0 ^c	11.5 ^f

The rates indicated are based on weighted data, significance tests were computed using unweighted data.

Difference between juveniles of Swiss and Balkan background: ^a $p \leq 0.05$, ^b $p \leq 0.01$, ^c $p \leq 0.001$

Difference between Swiss juveniles and juveniles from other countries: ^d $p \leq 0.05$, ^e $p \leq 0.01$, ^f $p \leq 0.001$

Difference between juveniles from the Balkan and any other countries: ^g $p \leq 0.05$, ^h $p \leq 0.01$, ⁱ $p \leq 0.001$

Overall, rates of violent victimisation are higher for “other” migrant juveniles than for Swiss respondents and those from the Balkan region (Table 2). Relatively unimportant are the differences between juveniles belonging to the so-called first and the second generation (Killias et al. 2010, data not shown here). The question remains whether or not the high rates of violence reported by juveniles living in Switzerland but originating from Balkan countries have a parallel among respondents living in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Juvenile Delinquency in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Switzerland

The realisation of a national self-report survey in Bosnia-Herzegovina allows to study whether or not a “culture of violence” has been imported into Switzerland through migration from the mentioned area. The results are presented in Table 3.

In comparison to Bosnia-Herzegovina, delinquency rates are substantially and significantly higher among youth in Switzerland (from all ethnic backgrounds), with the

Table 2 Victimisation among juveniles living in Switzerland who are of Swiss, Balkan and any other migrant backgrounds (students enrolled in grades 7 to 9)

Offences	Juveniles of Swiss Origin (N=2067)	Juveniles originating from the Balkan region (N=357)	Juveniles originating from other countries (N=415)
Robbery / extortion	1.7	2.5	2.6
Assault / threats	1.8	0.9	4.8 ^{d/h}
Theft	19.7	28.1 ^b	22.0
Bullying	11.9	7.7 ^b	16.3 ^{d/i}

The rates indicated are based on weighted data, significance tests were computed using unweighted data.

Difference between juveniles of Swiss and Balkan background: ^a $p \leq 0.05$, ^b $p \leq 0.01$, ^c $p \leq 0.001$

Difference between Swiss juveniles and juveniles from other countries: ^d $p \leq 0.05$, ^e $p \leq 0.01$, ^f $p \leq 0.001$

Difference between juveniles from the Balkan and any other countries: ^g $p \leq 0.05$, ^h $p \leq 0.01$, ⁱ $p \leq 0.001$

Table 3 Self-reported delinquency among juveniles in Switzerland (independently of their origin) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (7th and 8th grades)

Offences	Juveniles in Switzerland (N=2477)	Juveniles in Bosnia-Herzegovina (unweighted) (N=1756)
Assault / threats	1.0	0.9
Mugging	1.1	0.4**
Robbery	0.9	0.9
Theft of bicycles / motorcycles	3.2	0.4***
Shoplifting	8.9	1.8***
Drug trafficking	1.9	0.2***
Group fights	8.0	11.1**

The rates for Switzerland are weighted; significance tests were performed, however, using unweighted data. Significant difference between Switzerland and Bosnia-Herzegovina: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$

exception of group fights (where rates are lower) and robbery and assault (where rates are similar). A first possible explanation that comes to mind is opportunity structures, self-service shops being probably less popular and cannabis being less available in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Regarding victimisation, the picture is more complex (Table 4). Juveniles in Bosnia-Herzegovina report substantially more often experiences of robbery/extortion or assault. A first explanation is centred on reporting behaviour, following Junger's (1990) study on differential self-reporting of offences by ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. It might indeed be that young people in Bosnia-Herzegovina report less candidly having committed offences, but that they are less inhibited to report victimisations. If this were the case, one should expect a similar effect among young people of Balkan origins living in Switzerland, since they probably share the same cultural values (particularly regarding honour and delinquency) with their cousins still living in the countries of origin. As the data show, however, this is not the case, or at least not to the extent that the higher rates of violence among young immigrants from the Balkan region would remain masked in the data (shown in Table 1). In connection with victimisation under the form of bullying and theft, the rates are, once more, lower in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As a whole, it seems impossible to attribute the higher rates of violence in Switzerland among young migrants from this area to an "imported" culture of violence.

Table 4 Victimisation among juveniles in Switzerland and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (7th and 8th grades)

Offences	Juveniles in Switzerland (weighted) (N=2477)	Juveniles in Bosnia-Herzegovina (unweighted) (N=1756)
Robbery / extortion	2.5	7.1***
Assault / threats	1.9	5.0***
Theft	22.9	17.5***
Bullying	13.4	5.1***

The rates for Switzerland are weighted; significance tests were performed, however, using unweighted data. Significant difference between Switzerland and Bosnia-Herzegovina: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$

The relatively high rates of violent victimisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the low rates of delinquency are not unique. In other Eastern European countries that participated in the ISRD-2 (Russia, Poland, Czech Republic and others), similar differences were observed. It may well be that juveniles aged 13–15 are, in these countries, more often victimised by older adolescents than juveniles in Western Europe, and that younger children participate less in typical adolescent leisure-time activities due to a more rigid social control. A few years ago, a general crime survey in Bosnia-Herzegovina produced surprisingly low overall victimisation rates, particularly for burglary and robbery (Keller, Villettaz & Killias 2002). This was apparently due to the modest size of Bosnia's leisure-time industry, but could also explain the low level of problem behaviour among juveniles in the area. The style of education and control over juveniles (at least with regards the age-group taken into consideration here) may indeed be far less permissive in Bosnian families than in Western countries.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results presented here not only contradict the popular “culture conflict” perspective, but disconfirm also the popular idea that high violent rates among Balkan juveniles may be late outcomes of war traumas. Whatever the consequences of such traumas, they could not explain why juveniles living (and often even born) in Switzerland are admitting more violent offences than their cousins living in Bosnia-Herzegovina, since the latter must have been far more often exposed to such adverse influences. The most plausible explanation may be that juveniles from migrant families living in Switzerland (and possibly other European countries) face more problems in adapting to every-day life. The highly permissive Swiss society must appear to them like a “World full of opportunities” for which their parents may be less able to prepare them to face. Particularly a lifestyle which sees youths staying out late in the evenings, along with all sorts of deviant (including gang) activities may be hard for parents to control if they themselves were never exposed to such influences during their own adolescence.

A few more explanations suggested so far during public debates about these findings are not very convincing. For example, it does not seem possible that migrant youths are, so to speak, a negative, i.e. more delinquent selection out of the population of their country of origin. Migrant juveniles living in Switzerland were often born there or arrived during early childhood—a fact that makes the idea of a deliberate selection (of more delinquent subjects) impossible. Although it is true that, due to the small size of sub-samples of juveniles from the same ethnic group, the data in Tables 1 and 2 pertain to all juveniles from the Balkan region, whereas Tables 3 and 4 only include respondents living in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is not very likely that the high delinquency rates can be attributed to migrant youths from Turkey or countries such as, e.g., Albania or Kosovo. The similarity of delinquency and victimisation rates among juveniles from the Balkan region and “other” countries does certainly not support the idea that there are substantial differences between the several ethnic groups. Finally, Balkan countries, or at least the ex-Yugoslav countries, share a common educational tradition, in accordance to which keeping juveniles under more strict informal social control is an essential component. The same can be assumed for other Balkan countries—it is, therefore, plausible that juveniles from the entire Balkan region behave the same way in Switzerland.

The results presented here suggest, overall, to focus our attention more on the conditions of successful integration in the host country—and less on cultural and ethnic aspects. There

are, for example, some indications that juveniles from ethnic minorities, more often than others, hang around the streets (Markwalder, Lucia, Haymoz & Killias 2007) or that they are more involved in local gangs than others (Haymoz Pantillon 2010). Assisting migrant parents in finding adequate local leisure-time activities for their off-spring may be a suitable way to improve social integration and to prevent violence within this group.

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